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PERSONNEL

10 October 1963

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FITNESS REPORT GUIDE

1. GENERAL

- a. A Fitness Report records the opinion of a supervisor about the work performance of a subordinate. The report is only one element in the general evaluations which are constantly being made of employees. It is most important, however, to ensure that the evaluations in each Fitness Report are realistic and as meaningful as possible. Carefully prepared reports are extremely valuable for consideration in connection with the development of career plans for an individual and the review of personnel actions affecting him. On the other hand, Fitness Reports which do not objectively reflect the individual's performance may lead to personnel actions which are detrimental to him, to the supervisor, and to the Agency.
- b. Policy and procedural guidance concerning the preparation and submission of Fitness Reports is provided in [] and the instructions contained in Form 451, "Directions for Completing Form 45, Fitness Report."
- c. This Guide is designed to assist supervisors and reviewing officials in the application of rating standards provided in the Fitness Report form and to emphasize the significance of their narrative comments in the report. Observance of these guidelines should bring about more consistency in the use and interpretation of our adjective ratings and should result in providing management and the individual being rated with valid and useful information concerning the supervisor's opinions of the individual's work performance.

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2. PERFORMANCE RATINGS

a. ADJECTIVE RATINGS

To be valid for personnel management purposes, adjective ratings on Fitness Reports must be applied so that they will:

- (1) Reflect reasonable uniformity in the interpretation and application of rating standards; and
- (2) Make meaningful distinctions among employees performing work of similar nature and grade so that the more effective members of the group can be differentiated from the less effective.

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b. STANDARDS

Two general types of standards are available to guide supervisors in translating their evaluative judgments into adjective ratings:

- (1) Standards oriented to the manner in which an employee has met the specific requirements of his particular assignment. Such standards involve the appraisal of performance either in relation to established measures of behavior and productivity or in terms of the supervisor's less formalized conception of the way the particular job should be done.
- (2) Standards oriented toward the competitive comparison of an individual with other members of his group. The application of these standards involves the appraisal of performance either in relation to the particular past experience of the supervisor in observing other comparable individuals under similar circumstances, or in relation to the supervisor's concept of normal performance -- the manner in which an "average" member of the group would have performed under similar circumstances.

c. RATING THE PERFORMANCE OF SPECIFIC DUTIES

- (1) Either of the two types of standards described above might be selected to rate an employee's effectiveness in performing the specific duties of his job. The two standards afford different vantage points from which the supervisor can approach the rating process. Evaluations which tend to be based on specific requirements for the job will be more meaningful in circumstances where the demands of specific positions and the interrelationships between positions are clearly defined and generally understood. Competitive evaluations will be more meaningful in situations where the work requirements and relationships among jobs are less stable.
- (2) In no one of the Agency's major components are work requirements either so well established and stable or so unstable and vague as to warrant the adoption of one standard to the exclusion of the other. The choice is generally best left to the supervisor since he is most familiar with the realities of a given work situation. The supervisor, however, must be mindful that ratings on specific duties must be descriptive of performance in relation to the actual demands of the position. In every case, the validity of a Fitness Report is determined by the thoughtful, unbiased assessment that attends its preparation.

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a. RATING OVERALL PERFORMANCE

- (1) An overall performance rating does much more than describe effectiveness in carrying out specific duties. It takes into account everything about an employee that influences his effectiveness on his job. It also evaluates the relative quality of his work so that overall ratings can be used to identify employees whose performance has been of the highest quality as well as those who have performed least effectively. It is therefore appropriate to require that competitive standards be used in determining overall performance ratings, and henceforth this will be the practice throughout the Agency.
- (2) A spot check of Fitness Reports submitted in 1962 indicates that many supervisors in our Agency are not now applying competitive standards in rating overall performance. Our system provides for this purpose five adjectives, ranging from "WEAK" to "OUTSTANDING", so that proper distinctions can be made among employees based on the relative effectiveness of their work. Yet of the reports checked - and they applied to several very large competitive groups - over 85% employed only 2 of the 5 adjective ratings. The validity of such ratings is obviously open to question and their usefulness in connection with a number of important managerial decisions is sharply limited.
- (3) No one can prescribe the proportion of ratings within a particular competitive group that should carry a given adjective. Groups will vary by size, grade, type of work, and other circumstances. Nevertheless, it is clear that if Fitness Reports are to produce the meaningful distinctions among employees that our rating system requires in supporting a wide range of managerial decisions, we must have conscientious attention to competitive standards and reasonable uniformity in their application. On this latter point, it should be observed that in practice "PROFICIENT" has come to represent the "average" on our rating scale; it is therefore appropriate to adopt it as such in order to promote uniformity in the interpretation of our adjective ratings.

3. NARRATIVE COMMENTS

- a. The importance of full, meaningful comments in the narrative section of the Fitness Report cannot be overemphasized. If reports are to serve their purpose as one of the tools used in the selection, assignment, promotion, and management of personnel, they must not only contain performance ratings but must also provide clear, descriptive comments about employees so that management will have as much information as possible from this source.

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- b. It is to the narrative section of Fitness Reports that we look for a description of the employee and the details of his performance - his strengths and weaknesses, his training and development needs, his imagination and creative abilities, his supervisory skills, his writing and language facilities, his intellectual and social talents, and information on the manifold other qualities, traits, and personal circumstances we need for the proper management of his career. No single report will contain all these elements of information; but, if comments on an employee are consistently well done and meet the standards of quality and integrity for which we are striving, then the accumulation of ratings and comments over a period of several years will provide a solid basis on which to make sound management decisions.

4. COMMENTS BY REVIEWING OFFICIAL

- a. The reviewing official makes at least two important contributions to a Fitness Report. He increases its objectivity by balancing his own evaluation of the employee, utilizing a broader frame of reference, against that of the supervisor. He also increases its usefulness by supplying additional comments and observations about the employee.
- b. Reviewing officials should comment on every Fitness Report and more fully on those containing high or low ratings. They must also carry out effectively their responsibility for assuring greater consistency in the interpretation and application of rating standards by supervisors under their jurisdiction.
- c. Our objective in the preparation of Fitness Reports is to make each report a comprehensive record of the performance by the employee of the duties assigned him during the rating period and to provide an appraisal of his future usefulness. Each report is important but it is the accumulation of reports over the years that provides the meaningful body of information about each employee so necessary in his career management. We look to supervisors for most of this information. We look primarily to the reviewing officials to assure that the information is provided and conforms to Agency rating standards.

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